

Research Memorandum

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Soviet published commentary on the Safeguard decision has not been voluminous. It has not been authoritative; there have been no official statements on the subject, and the matter has been left to journalists. It has not been original; virtually all of the arguments discussed by the Soviet commentators have been ones they have gleaned from the US press.

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Soviet commentators evidently welcomed the opportunity to cast Secretary of Defense Laird rather than the President as the principal villain.

In their efforts to exploit the US ABM decision, Soviet propagandists have exposed Soviet citizens to American anti-ABM arguments of a kind which last year circulated illicitly in the underground Sakharov memorandum. While this development is not likely to have any early effects on Soviet policy on strategic arms talks, it may have unintended consequences over the longer run. If such publicity for anti-armaments arguments from the US continues, the Soviet leaders may find they have to make more of an effort to justify their own arms spending later on.

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Predictably, published Soviet commentary on the US decision to deploy the Safeguard ABM system has not been voluminous. It has accounted for less than one percent of the substantive broadcasts monitored by FBIS. Nor has it been original. No Soviet argumentation has been developed. Soviet broadcasters and newspapermen have pretty well kept to reporting, quoting and commenting on material from the US press. No authoritative public statements--leadership speeches, government statements or "authorized" TASS statements--have appeared since the Safeguard decision was announced.

A New Movement vs. The Military-Industrial Complex

Soviet journalists have taken naturally to describing the ABM debate in the US in terms of a new mass movement's struggle against the "military-industrial complex." This dichotomy, which fits well with Marxist preconceptions about class struggle, had been developed by Izvestiya's Vikenty Matveyev even before the Safeguard decision was announced. Soviet commentators were thus quick to pick up suggestions in the US press that the ABM debate would be the first real test of which direction the Nixon Administration would take--toward detente or toward a stepped-up arms race.

Personalities--Laird and Packard

Indeed, some of the early comments (in particular English-language broadcasts to North America) began saying that the President had decided to follow in President Johnson's footsteps. Defense Secretary Laird's testimony provided an occasion for a reformulation on this point. He quickly became the bête noire of Soviet publicists, and one had the impression that they were relieved to find someone other than President to cast as the devil in their morality play version of American politics. Indeed, several have used American press items in an effort to show that Secretary Laird was in disagreement with the President over evaluations of the USSR.

Soviet propagandists have several times pointed to Mr. Packard's background as an industrialist in the defense field to document their charges of the machinations of the "military-industrial complex" (a term they have adopted from the American press).

American Arguments Against American ABMs

Soviet propaganda has used exclusively American arguments about American ABMs, and nearly all of the points adduced in the US have been reported in the Soviet press:

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references to the Soviet Union's ABMs have been quite sparse for about a year. However, in attempting to exploit the American debate the Soviets have been presenting to readers of Pravda, Izvestiya, and even Red Star American arguments against ABMs which had not had such officially sponsored circulation in the USSR before. Last year Soviet physicist Sakharov illicitly circulated anti-ABM arguments (r tly plagiarized from American scientist Hans Bethe) in an underground memorandum published in the West. Now these arguments--presented in an American context to be sure--have been given a certain currency in the USSR. This is hardly likely to have any early effects on Soviet policy on such matters as strategic arms talks. But over the longer run, continued publication of American arguments against strategic weapons programs may have some unintended consequences in the USSR and Soviet leaders could in future years find it necessary to present more in the way of argumentation to justify their own arms spending to the Soviet citizenry.

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